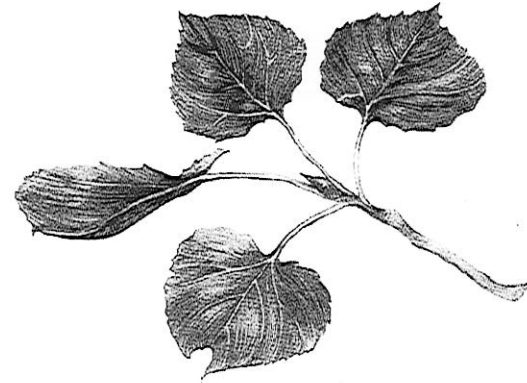


EXAMPLE

Pointing to Instances



THE METHOD

"There have been many women runners of distinction," a writer begins, and quickly goes on, "among them Joan Benoit, Grete Waitz, Florence Griffith Joyner..."

You have just seen examples at work. An **EXAMPLE** (from the Latin *exemplum*: "one thing selected from among many") is an instance that reveals a whole type. By selecting an example, a writer shows the nature or character of the group from which it is taken. In a written essay, examples will often serve to illustrate a general statement, or **GENERALIZATION**. Here, for instance, the writer Linda Wolfe makes a point about the food fetishes of Roman emperors (Domitian and Claudius ruled in the first century A.D.).

The emperors used their gastronomical concerns to indicate their contempt of the country and the whole task of governing it. Domitian humiliated his cabinet by forcing them to attend him at his villa to help solve a serious problem. When they arrived he kept them waiting for hours. The problem, it finally appeared, was that the emperor had just purchased a giant fish, too large for any dish he owned, and he needed the learned brains of his ministers to decide

whether the fish should be minced or whether a larger pot should be sought. The emperor Claudius one day rode hurriedly to the Senate and demanded they deliberate the importance of a life without pork. Another time he sat in his tribunal ostensibly administering justice but actually allowing the litigants to argue and orate while he grew dreamy, interrupting the discussions only to announce, "Meat pies are wonderful. We shall have them for dinner."

Wolfe might have allowed the opening sentence of her paragraph—the TOPIC SENTENCE—to remain a vague generalization. Instead, she supports it with three examples, each a brief story of an emperor's contemptuous behavior. With these examples, Wolfe not only explains and supports her generalization but also animates it.

The method of giving examples—of illustrating what you're saying with a "for instance"—is not merely helpful to practically all kinds of writing, it is indispensable. Bad writers—those who bore us, or lose us completely—often have an ample supply of ideas; their trouble is that they never pull their ideas down out of the clouds. A dull writer, for instance, might declare, "The emperors used food to humiliate their governments," and then, instead of giving examples, go on, "They also manipulated their families," or something—adding still another large, unillustrated idea. Specific examples are *needed* elements in effective prose. Not only do they make ideas understandable, but they also keep readers awake. (The previous paragraphs have tried—by giving examples from Linda Wolfe and from "a dull writer"—to illustrate this point.)

THE PROCESS

The Generalization

Examples illustrate a generalization, such as Linda Wolfe's opening statement about the Roman emperors, and any example essay is bound to have a generalization as its THESIS STATEMENT. Here are a few examples from the essays in this chapter:

Sometimes I think we would be better off [in dealing with social problems] if we forgot about the broad strokes and concentrated on the details. (Anna Quindlen, "Homeless")

That first encounter, and those that followed, signified that a vast, unnerving gulf lay between nighttime pedestrians—particularly women—and me. (Brent Staples, "Black Men and Public Space")

Such a generalization forms the backbone, the central idea, of an essay developed by example. Then the specifics bring the idea down to earth for readers.

The Examples

An essay developed by example will often start with an example or two. That is, you'll see something—a man pilfering a quarter for bus fare from a child's Kool-Aid stand, a friend dating another friend's fiancé (or fiancée)—and your observation will suggest a generalization (perhaps a statement about how people mishandle ethical dilemmas). But a mere example or two probably won't demonstrate your generalization for readers and thus won't achieve your PURPOSE. For that you'll need a range of instances.

Where do you find more? In anything you know—or care to learn. Start close to home. Seek examples in your own immediate knowledge and experience. Explore your conversations with others, your studies, and the storehouse of information you have gathered from books, newspapers, magazines, radio, and TV and from popular hearsay: proverbs and sayings, bits of wisdom you've heard voiced in your family, folklore, popular song.

Now and again, you may feel an irresistible temptation to make up an example out of thin air. This procedure is risky, but can work wonderfully—if, that is, you have a wonder-working imagination. When Henry David Thoreau, in *Walden*, attacks Americans' smug pride in the achievements of nineteenth-century science and industry, he wants to illustrate that kind of invention or discovery "which distracts our attention from serious things." And so he makes up the examples—far-fetched at the time, but pointed—of a transatlantic speaking tube and what it might convey: "We are eager to tunnel under the Atlantic and bring the Old World some weeks nearer to the New; but perchance the first news that will leak through into the broad, flapping American ear will be that the Princess Adelaide has the whooping cough." (Thoreau would be appalled at our immersion in the British Royal Family via just the sort of communication he imagined.)

Thoreau's examples (and the sarcastic phrase about the American ear) bespeak genius; but, of course, not every writer can be a Thoreau—or needs to be. A hypothetical example may well be better than no example at all; yet, as a rule, an example from fact or experience is likely to carry more weight. Suppose you have to write about the benefits—any benefits—that recent science has conferred upon the nation. You might imagine one such benefit: the prospect of one day being able to vacation in outer space and drift about in free-fall like a soap bubble. That imagined benefit would be all right, but it is obviously a conjecture that you dreamed up without going to the library. Do a little digging in recent books and magazines (for the latter, with the aid of the *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*). Your reader will feel

better informed to be told that science—specifically, the NASA space program—has produced useful inventions. You add:

Among these are the smoke detector, originally developed as Skylab equipment; the inflatable air bag to protect drivers and pilots, designed to cushion astronauts in splashdowns; a walking chair that enables paraplegics to mount stairs and travel over uneven ground, derived from the moonwalkers' surface buggy; the technique of cryosurgery, the removal of cancerous tissue by fast freezing.

By using specific examples like these, you render the idea of "benefits to society" more concrete and more definite. Such examples are not pretifications of your essay; they are necessary if you are to hold your readers' attention and convince them that you are worth listening to.

When giving examples, you'll find other methods useful. Sometimes, as in the paragraph by Linda Wolfe, an example takes the form of a NARRATIVE (Chap. 1): a brief story, an ANECDOTE, or a case history. Sometimes an example embodies a vivid DESCRIPTION of a person, place, or thing (Chap. 2).

Lazy writers think, "Oh well, I can't come up with any example here—I'll just leave it to the reader to find one." The flaw in this ASSUMPTION is that the reader may be as lazy as the writer. As a result, a perfectly good idea may be left suspended in the stratosphere. The linguist and writer S. I. Hayakawa tells the story of a professor who, in teaching a philosophy course, spent a whole semester on the theory of beauty. When students asked him for a few examples of beautiful paintings, symphonies, or works of nature, he refused, saying, "We are interested in principles, not in particulars." The professor himself may well have been interested in principles, but it is a safe bet that his classroom resounded with snores. In written EXPOSITION, it is undoubtedly the particulars—the pertinent examples—that keep a reader awake and having a good time, and taking in the principles besides.

CHECKLIST FOR REVISING AN EXAMPLE ESSAY

- ✓ **GENERALIZATION.** What general statement do your examples illustrate? Will it be clear to readers what ties the examples together?
- ✓ **SUPPORT.** Do you have enough examples to establish your generalization, or will readers be left needing more?
- ✓ **SPECIFICS.** Are your examples detailed? Does each capture some aspects of the generalization?
- ✓ **RELEVANCE.** Do all your examples relate to your generalization? Should any be cut because they go off-track?

EXAMPLE IN A PARAGRAPH: TWO ILLUSTRATIONS

Using Example to Write About Television

This paragraph appears in an essay maintaining that television merely simulates, or imitates, real problems, events, activities, and institutions. The essay offers many examples of programming that only seems to represent what's real, such as morning news shows, small-claims courts (*The People's Court* and *Judge Judy*), and wrestling. Here the author uses further examples of TV wrestling to show how it simulates televised football, basketball, and other sports.

To sustain the simulation, wrestling must construct and maintain a little universe of the simulated. To do this, its discourse refers in its every enunciation to the apparatus used to broadcast conventional sport. Wrestling features the same style of ringside commentary, the same interpolation of interviews, the same mystification of sporting expertise, the same freeze-frame and instant replay formats, the same faintly prurient interest in the wrestlers' private lives (not to mention parts), the same cults of personality, and so on. This system of understanding, however, is marshaled in the service of an event which is a parody of its originating source: "real" sport.

—Michael Sorkin, "Faking It,"
in *Watching Television*, ed. Todd Gitlin

Using Example in an Academic Discipline

The following paragraph from an economics textbook appears amid the author's explanation of how markets work. To dispel what might seem clouds of theory, the author here brings an abstract principle down to earth with a concrete and detailed example.

The primary function of the market is to bring together suppliers and demanders so that they can trade with one another. Buyers and sellers do not necessarily have to be in face-to-face contact; they can signal their desires and intentions through various intermediaries. For example, the demand for green beans in California is not expressed directly by the green bean consumers to the green bean growers. People who want green beans buy them at a grocery store; the store orders them from a vegetable wholesaler; the wholesaler buys them from a bean cooperative, whose manager tells local farmers of the size of the current demand for green beans. The demanders of green beans are able to

signal their demand schedule to the original suppliers, the farmers who raise the beans, without any personal communication between the two parties.

—Lewis C. Solmon, *Microeconomics*

EXAMPLE ELSEWHERE IN *THE BRIEF BEDFORD READER*

Every selection in this book uses examples: They are, as we have said, a mainstay of clear, specific writing. In the essays listed below, the authors depend on a single extended example or a series of examples while also developing their ideas by other methods.

PART ONE

Barbara Huttman, "A Crime of Compassion"
 Merrill Markoe, "Bob the Dog (1974–1988)"
 Suzanne Britt, "Neat People vs. Sloppy People"
 Dave Barry, "Batting Clean-Up and Striking Out"
 Judy Brady, "I Want a Wife"
 Armin A. Brott, "Not All Men Are Sly Foxes"
 Russell Baker, "The Plot Against People"
 Deborah Tannen, "But What Do You Mean?"
 Stephanie Ericsson, "The Ways We Lie"
 William Lutz, "The World of Doublespeak"
 Gloria Naylor, "The Meanings of a Word"
 Christine Leong, "Being a Chink"
 Michael Kroll, "The Unquiet Death of Robert Harris"
 William F. Buckley, Jr., "Why Don't We Complain?"

PART TWO

Annie Dillard, "Lenses"
 George Orwell, "Shooting an Elephant"

CASE STUDY Using Examples

As a college sophomore, Kharron Reid was applying for a summer internship implementing computer networks for businesses. He put together a résumé structured to present his previous work experience and his education for this kind of job. (See the résumé on pp. 257–58.)

In drafting a cover letter for the résumé, Reid at first found himself repeating all his background in a very long letter. On the advice of his school's placement office, he rewrote the letter to emphasize just what the prospective employer would most need to know: the work, courses, and computer skills that qualified him for the opening it had. The rewritten letter, below, focuses on examples from the résumé to support the statement (in the second-to-last paragraph) that "my education and my hands-on experience with networking prepare me for the opening you have."

Kharron Reid
 137 Chester St., Apt. E
 Allston, MA 02134
 February 23, 1999

Ms. Dolores Jackson
 Human Resources Director
 E-line Systems
 75 Arondale Avenue
 Boston, MA 02114

Dear Ms. Jackson:

I am applying for the networking internship in your information technology department, advertised in the career services office of Boston University.

I have considerable experience in networking from summer internships at NBS Systems and at Pioneer Networking. At NBS I planned and laid the physical platforms and configured the software for seven WANs on a Windows NT server. At Pioneer, I laid the physical platforms and configured the software to connect eight workstations into a LAN. Both internships gave me experience in every stage of networking.

In the fall I will be entering my third year in Boston University's School of Management, majoring in business administration and information systems. I have completed courses in computers (including programming), information systems, and

business. In addition to my experience and coursework, I am proficient in Unix, NT, and Linux.

As the enclosed résumé indicates, my education and my hands-on experience with networking prepare me for the opening you have.

I am available for an interview at your convenience. Please call me at (617) 555-4009 or e-mail me at kreid@bu.edu.

Sincerely,

Kharron Reid

Kharron Reid

BARBARA LAZEAR ASCHER

BARBARA LAZEAR ASCHER was born in 1946 and educated at Bennington College and Cardozo School of Law. She practiced law for two years in a private firm, where she found herself part of a power structure in which those on top resembled "the two-year-old with the biggest plastic pail and shovel on the beach. It's a life of nervous guardianship." Ascher quit the law to devote herself to writing, to explore, as she says, "what really matters." Her essays have appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Yale Review*, *Vogue*, and other periodicals and have been collected in *Playing After Dark* (1986) and *The Habit of Loving* (1989). She is a contributing editor of *Self* magazine. Her most recent books are *Landscape Without Gravity: A Memoir of Grief* (1993), about her brother's death from AIDS; and *Dancing in the Dark: Romance, Yearning, and the Search for the Sublime* (1999), about our search for romance in our lives.

On Compassion

Ascher often writes about life in New York City, where human problems sometimes seem larger and more stubborn than in other places. In this essay Ascher uses examples from the city to address a universal need: compassion for those who require help. First published in *Elle* magazine in 1988, the essay was later reprinted in *The Habit of Loving*. The essay following this one, Anna Quindlen's "Homeless," addresses the same issue.

The man's grin is less the result of circumstance than dreams or madness. His buttonless shirt, with one sleeve missing, hangs outside the waist of his baggy trousers. Carefully plaited dreadlocks bespeak a better time, long ago. As he crosses Manhattan's Seventy-ninth Street, his gait is the shuffle of the forgotten ones held in place by gravity rather than plans. On the corner of Madison Avenue, he stops before a blond baby in an Aprica stroller. The baby's mother waits for the light to change and her hands close tighter on the stroller's handle as she sees the man approach.

The others on the corner, five men and women waiting for the crosstown bus, look away. They daydream a bit and gaze into the weak rays of November light. A man with a briefcase lifts and lowers the shiny toe of his right shoe, watching the light reflect, trying to catch and balance it, as if he could hold and make it his, to ease the heavy gray of coming January, February, and March. The winter months that will send snow around the feet, calves, and knees of the grinning man as he heads for the shelter of Grand Central or Pennsylvania Station.

But for now, in this last gasp of autumn warmth, he is still. His eyes fix on the baby. The mother removes her purse from her shoulder and rummages through its contents: lipstick, a lace handkerchief, an address book. She finds what she's looking for and passes a folded dollar over her child's head to the man who stands and stares even though the light has changed and traffic navigates about his hips.

His hands continue to dangle at his sides. He does not know his part. He does not know that acceptance of the gift and gratitude are what make this transaction complete. The baby, weary of the unwavering stare, pulls its blanket over its head. The man does not look away. Like a bridegroom waiting at the altar, his eyes pierce the white veil.

The mother grows impatient and pushes the stroller before her, bearing the dollar like a cross. Finally, a black hand rises and closes around green.

Was it fear or compassion that motivated the gift?

Up the avenue, at Ninety-first Street, there is a small French bread shop where you can sit and eat a buttery, overpriced croissant and wash it down with rich cappuccino. Twice when I have stopped here to stave hunger or stay the cold, twice as I have sat and read and felt the warm rush of hot coffee and milk, an old man has wandered in and stood inside the entrance. He wears a stained blanket pulled up to his chin, and a woolen hood pulled down to his gray, bushy eyebrows. As he stands, the scent of stale cigarettes and urine fills the small, overheated room.

The owner of the shop, a moody French woman, emerges from the kitchen with steaming coffee in a Styrofoam cup, and a small paper bag of... of what? Yesterday's bread? Today's croissant? He accepts the offering as silently as he came, and is gone.

Twice I have witnessed this, and twice I have wondered, what compels this woman to feed this man? Pity? Care? Compassion? Or does she simply want to rid her shop of his troublesome presence? If expulsion were her motivation she would not reward his arrival with gifts of food. Most proprietors do not. They chase the homeless from their midst with expletives and threats.

As winter approaches, the mayor of New York City is moving the homeless off the streets and into Bellevue Hospital. The New York Civil Liberties Union is watchful. They question whether the rights of these people who live in our parks and doorways are being violated by involuntary hospitalization.

I think the mayor's notion is humane, but I fear it is something else as well. Raw humanity offends our sensibilities. We want to protect ourselves from an awareness of rags with voices that make no sense and scream forth in inarticulate rage. We do not wish to be reminded of the tentative state of our own well-being and sanity. And so, the troublesome presence is removed from the awareness of the electorate.

Like other cities, there is much about Manhattan now that resembles Dickensian London. Ladies in high-heeled shoes pick their way through poverty and madness. You hear more cocktail party complaints than usual, "I just can't take New York anymore." Our citizens dream of the open spaces of Wyoming, the manicured exclusivity of Hobe Sound.

And yet, it may be that these are the conditions that finally give birth to empathy, the mother of compassion. We cannot deny the existence of the helpless as their presence grows. It is impossible to insulate ourselves against what is at our very doorstep. I don't believe that one is born compassionate. Compassion is not a character trait like a sunny disposition. It must be learned, and it is learned by having adversity at our windows, coming through the gates of our yards, the walls of our towns, adversity that becomes so familiar that we begin to identify and empathize with it.

For the ancient Greeks, drama taught and reinforced compassion within a society. The object of Greek tragedy was to inspire empathy in the audience so that the common response to the hero's fall was: "There, but for the grace of God, go I." Could it be that this was the response of the mother who offered the dollar, the French woman who gave the food? Could it be that the homeless, like those ancients, are reminding us of our common humanity? Of course, there is a difference. This play doesn't end—and the players can't go home.

QUESTIONS ON MEANING

1. What do the two men in Ascher's essay exemplify?
2. What is Ascher's **THESIS**? What is her **PURPOSE**?
3. What solution to homelessness is introduced in paragraph 10? What does Ascher think of this possibility?
4. How do you interpret Ascher's last sentence? Is she optimistic or pessimistic about whether people will learn compassion?

QUESTIONS ON WRITING STRATEGY

1. Which comes first, the **GENERALIZATIONS** or the supporting examples? Why has Ascher chosen this order?
2. What assumptions does the author make about her **AUDIENCE**?
3. Why do the other people at the bus stop look away (para. 2)? What does Ascher's description of their activities say about them?
4. **OTHER METHODS.** Ascher explores **CAUSES AND EFFECTS**. Do you agree with her that exposure to others' helplessness increases our compassion? Why, or why not?

QUESTIONS ON LANGUAGE

1. What is the difference between empathy and compassion? Why does Ascher say that "empathy [is] the mother of compassion" (para. 13)?
2. Find definitions for the following words: plaited, dreadlocks, bespeak (para. 1); stave, stay (7); expletives (9); inarticulate, electorate (11).
3. What are the implications of Ascher's ALLUSION to "Dickensian London" (para. 12)?
4. Examine the language Ascher uses to describe the two homeless men. Is it OBJECTIVE? sympathetic? negative?

SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING

1. **JOURNAL WRITING.** Write about a personal experience with misfortune. Have you needed to beg on the street, been evicted from an apartment, had to scrounge for food? Have you worked in a soup kitchen, been asked for money by beggars, helped out in a city hospital?
FROM JOURNAL TO ESSAY. Write an essay on the experience you explored in your journal, using examples to convey the effect the experience had on you.
2. Write an essay on the problem of homelessness in your town or city. Use examples to support your view of the problem and a possible solution.
3. Ascher refers to the efforts of New York City to move the homeless off the streets (para. 10). In October 1987, one of New York's homeless, Joyce Brown, was taken off the sidewalk where she lived to Bellevue Hospital. The American Civil Liberties Union sued on her behalf, claiming that she was not a danger to herself or to others—the grounds for involuntary hospitalization. Although Brown was eventually released in January 1988, the issue of the city's right to hospitalize her was never resolved. Consult the *New York Times Index* and the *Times* itself for news articles and editorials on this situation. Write an essay arguing for or against Joyce Brown's freedom to live on the street, supporting your argument with EVIDENCE from the newspaper and from your own experience.
4. **CRITICAL WRITING.** In her last paragraph, Ascher mentions but does not address another key difference between the characters in Greek tragedy and the homeless on today's streets: The former were "heroes"—gods and goddesses, kings and queens—whereas the latter are placeless, poor, anonymous, even reviled. Does this difference negate Ascher's comparison between Greek theatergoers and ourselves or her larger point about how compassion is learned? Answer in a brief essay, saying why or why not.
5. **CONNECTIONS.** The next essay, Anna Quindlen's "Homeless," also uses examples to make a point about homelessness. What are some of the differences in the examples each writer uses? In a brief essay, explore whether and how these differences create different TONES in the two works.

BARBARA LAZEAR ASCHER ON WRITING

A lawyer before she was a full-time writer, Barbara Lazear Ascher thinks that her legal training helped her become a stronger writer.

"I believe there is a kind of legal thinking that becomes part of your own thinking," she told Jean W. Ross of *Contemporary Authors*. "What it did for me was help me to become quite a tight writer. My pieces are very short, and I think a lot of that has to do with the training in law, which is to tell the facts and the theories, and then put it all together and close it up. I might have been a more excessive writer if I hadn't had the legal training."

For Ascher, the essay is the ideal form of expression. "I'm quite impatient, so it's very satisfying to have a small space in which to tell what it was you wanted to tell. You get to the point right away instead of having to drag it out and slowly reveal it."

FOR DISCUSSION

1. How did her legal training help Ascher when she became a writer? How does a "tight writer" help readers as well?
2. How might an "excessive writer" have trouble with the essay form? What, in your view, is "excessive" writing?

ANNA QUINDLEN

ANNA QUINDLEN was born in 1952 and graduated from Barnard College in 1974. She worked as a reporter for the *New York Post* and the *New York Times* before taking over the *Times*'s "About New York" column, serving as the paper's deputy metropolitan editor, and in 1986 creating her own weekly column, "Life in the Thirties." Many of the essays from this popular column were collected in *Living Out Loud* (1988). Between 1989 and 1994 Quindlen wrote a twice-weekly op-ed column for the *Times*, on social and political issues. The columns earned her the Pulitzer Prize in 1992, and many of them were collected in *Thinking Out Loud: On the Personal, the Political, the Public, and the Private* (1993). Quindlen has also published two books about children, one for children, and three successful novels: *Object Lessons* (1991), *One True Thing* (1994), and *Black and Blue: A Novel* (1998). *One True Thing* was made into a movie starring Meryl Streep.

Homeless

In this essay from *Living Out Loud*, Quindlen uses examples to explore the same topic as Barbara Lazear Ascher (p. 125), but with a different slant. Typically for Quindlen, she mingles a reporter's respect for details with a passionate regard for life.

Her name was Ann, and we met in the Port Authority Bus Terminal several Januarys ago. I was doing a story on homeless people. She said I was wasting my time talking to her; she was just passing through, although she'd been passing through for more than two weeks. To prove to me that this was true, she rummaged through a tote bag and a manila envelope and finally unfolded a sheet of typing paper and brought out her photographs.

They were not pictures of family, or friends, or even a dog or cat, its eyes brown-red in the flashbulb's light. They were pictures of a house. It was like a thousand houses in a hundred towns, not suburb, not city, but somewhere in between, with aluminum siding and a chain-link fence, a narrow driveway running up to a one-car garage and a patch of backyard. The house was yellow. I looked on the back for a date or a name, but neither was there. There was no need for discussion. I knew what she was trying to tell me, for it was something I had often felt. She was not adrift, alone, anonymous, although her bags and her raincoat with the grime shadowing its creases had made me believe she was. She had a house, or at least once upon a time had had one. Inside were curtains, a couch, a stove, potholders. You are where you live. She was somebody.

I've never been very good at looking at the big picture, taking the global view, and I've always been a person with an overactive sense of place, the legacy of an Irish grandfather. So it is natural that the thing that seems most wrong with the world to me right now is that there are so many people with no homes. I'm not simply talking about shelter from the elements, or three square meals a day or a mailing address to which the welfare people can send the check—although I know that all these are important for survival. I'm talking about a home, about precisely those kinds of feelings that have wound up in cross-stitch and French knots on samplers over the years.

Home is where the heart is. There's no place like it. I love my home with a ferocity totally out of proportion to its appearance or location. I love dumb things about it: the hot-water heater, the plastic rack you drain dishes in, the roof over my head, which occasionally leaks. And yet it is precisely those dumb things that make it what it is—a place of certainty, stability, predictability, privacy, for me and for my family. It is where I live. What more can you say about a place than that? That is everything.

Yet it is something that we have been edging away from gradually during my lifetime and the lifetimes of my parents and grandparents. There was a time when where you lived often was where you worked and where you grew the food you ate and even where you were buried. When that era passed, where you lived at least was where your parents had lived and where you would live with your children when you became enfeebled. Then, suddenly where you lived was where you lived for three years, until you could move on to something else and something else again.

And so we have come to something else again, to children who do not understand what it means to go to their rooms because they have never had a room, to men and women whose fantasy is a wall they can paint a color of their own choosing, to old people reduced to sitting on molded plastic chairs, their skin blue-white in the lights of a bus station, who pull pictures of houses out of their bags. Homes have stopped being homes. Now they are real estate.

People find it curious that those without homes would rather sleep sitting up on benches or huddled in doorways than go to shelters. Certainly some prefer to do so because they are emotionally ill, because they have been locked in before and they are damned if they will be locked in again. Others are afraid of the violence and trouble they may find there. But some seem to want something that is not available in shelters, and they will not compromise, not for a cot, or oatmeal, or a shower with special soap that kills the bugs. "One room," a woman with a baby who was sleeping on her sister's floor, once told me, "painted blue." That was the crux of it: not size or location, but pride of ownership. Painted blue.

This is a difficult problem, and some wise and compassionate people are working hard at it. But in the main I think we work around it, just as we walk around it when it is lying on the sidewalk or sitting in the bus terminal—the problem, that is. It has been customary to take people's pain and lessen our own participation in it by turning it into an issue, not a collection of human beings. We turn an adjective into a noun: the poor, not poor people; the homeless, not Ann or the man who lives in the box or the woman who sleeps on the subway grate.

Sometimes I think we would be better off if we forgot about the broad strokes and concentrated on the details. Here is a woman without a bureau. There is a man with no mirror, no wall to hang it on. They are not the homeless. They are people who have no homes. No drawer that holds the spoons. No window to look out upon the world. My God. That is everything.

QUESTIONS ON MEANING

1. What is Quindlen's **THESIS**?
2. What distinction is Quindlen making in her **CONCLUSION** with the sentences "They are not the homeless. They are people who have no homes"?
3. Why does Quindlen believe that having a home is important?

QUESTIONS ON WRITING STRATEGY

1. Why do you think Quindlen begins with the story of Ann? How else might Quindlen have begun her essay?
2. What is the **EFFECT** of Quindlen's examples of her own home?
3. What key **ASSUMPTIONS** does the author make about her **AUDIENCE**? Are the assumptions reasonable? Where does she specifically address an assumption that might undermine her view?
4. **OTHER METHODS.** Quindlen uses examples to support an **ARGUMENT**. What position does she want readers to recognize and accept?

QUESTIONS ON LANGUAGE

1. What is the effect of "My God" in the last paragraph?
2. How might Quindlen be said to give new meaning to the old **CLICHÉ** "Home is where the heart is" (para. 4)?
3. What is meant by "crux" (para. 7)? Where does the word come from?

SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING

1. **JOURNAL WRITING.** What does the word *home* mean to you? Does it involve material things, privacy, family, a sense of permanence? Explore your idea of the word in your journal.
FROM JOURNAL TO ESSAY. Write an essay that gives a detailed **DEFINITION** of *home* by using your own home(s), hometown(s), or experiences with home(s) as supporting examples. See Chap. 9 if you need help with definition.)
2. Have you ever moved from one place to another? What sort of experience was it? Write an essay about leaving an old home and moving to a new one. Was there an activity or a piece of furniture that helped ease the transition?
3. Address Quindlen's contention that turning homelessness into an issue avoids the problem, that we might "be better off if we forgot about the broad strokes and concentrated on the details."
4. **CRITICAL WRITING.** Write a brief essay in which you agree or disagree with Quindlen's assertion that a home is "everything." Can one, for instance, be a fulfilled person without a home? In your answer, take account of the values that might underlie an attachment to home; Quindlen mentions "certainty, stability, predictability, privacy" (para. 4), but there are others, including some (such as fear) that are less positive.
5. **CONNECTIONS.** **COMPARE AND CONTRAST** the views of homelessness and its solution in Quindlen's "Homeless" and Barbara Lazear Ascher's "On Compassion" (p. 125). Use specific passages from each essay to support your comparison.

ANNA QUINDLEN ON WRITING

Anna Quindlen started her writing career as a newspaper reporter. "I had wanted to be a writer for most of my life," she recalls in the introduction to her book *Living Out Loud*, "and in the service of the writing I became a reporter. For many years I was able to observe, even to feel, life vividly, but at secondhand. I was able to stand over the chalk outline of a body on a sidewalk dappled with black blood; to stand behind the glass and look down into an operating theater where one man was placing a heart in the yawning chest of another; to sit in the park on the first day of summer and find myself professionally obligated to record all the glories of it. Every day I found answers: who, what, when, where, and why."

Quindlen was a good reporter, but the business of finding answers did not satisfy her personally. "In my own life," she continues, "I had only questions." Then she switched from reporter to columnist at the *New York Times*. It was "exhilarating," she says, that "my work became a reflection of my life. After years of being a professional observer of other people's lives, I was given the opportunity to be a professional observer of

my own. I was permitted—and permitted myself—to write a column, not about my answers, but about my questions. Never did I make so much sense of my life as I did then, for it was inevitable that as a writer I would find out most clearly what I thought, and what I only thought I thought, when I saw it written down.... After years of feeling second-hand, of feeling the pain of the widow, the joy of the winner, I was able to allow myself to feel those emotions for myself.”

FOR DISCUSSION

1. What were the advantages and disadvantages of news reporting, according to Quindlen?
2. What did Quindlen feel she could accomplish in a column that she could not accomplish in a news report? What evidence of this difference do you see in her essay “Homeless”?

JOHN MCPHEE

The acclaimed nonfiction writer JOHN MCPHEE creates an elegantly detailed bridge between specialists and nonspecialists on subjects as diverse as basketball, orange growing, the Alaskan frontier, and the environmental problem of discarded tires. McPhee was born in 1931 in Princeton, New Jersey, and graduated from Princeton University in 1953. He has been a staff writer for *The New Yorker* since 1964 and Ferris Professor of Journalism at Princeton since 1975. In more than two dozen books, McPhee has provided readers, in the words of the critic T. H. Watkins, with “swift, lucid, authoritative stuff produced with a reporter’s sure eye and a writer’s love of language.” His best-known books include *Coming into the Country* (1977), *The Control of Nature* (1989), and *Annals of the Former World* (1998), the last two exploring a favorite subject of McPhee’s, the ever-changing earth. Described by McPhee as “three pounds of literary geology,” *Annals of the Former World* won the Pulitzer Prize in 1999.

Silk Parachute

In this uncharacteristic piece of autobiography, McPhee leads us through the process of seeking a generalization in examples: To sum up his mother, he offers incidents in his life with her. The essay originally appeared in *The New Yorker* in May 1997.

When your mother is ninety-nine years old, you have so many memories of her that they tend to overlap, intermingle, and blur. It is extremely difficult to single out one or two, impossible to remember any that exemplify the whole.

It has been alleged that when I was in college she heard that I had stayed up all night playing poker and wrote me a letter that used the word “shame” forty-two times. I do not recall this.

I do not recall being pulled out of my college room and into the church next door.

It has been alleged that on December 24, 1936, when I was five years old, she sent me to my room at or close to 7 P.M. for using four-letter words while trimming the Christmas tree. I do not recall that.

The assertion is absolutely false that when I came home from high school with an A-minus she demanded an explanation for the minus.

It has been alleged that she spoiled me with protectionism, because I was the youngest child and therefore the most vulnerable to attack from overhead—an assertion that I cannot confirm or confute, except